



News Release

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James H. Omvig Elected Vice Chairperson of Presidentially-Appointed Committee that Creates Jobs for People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled

James H. Omvig, a resident of Baltimore, Md., was unanimously elected Vice Chairperson of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (Committee) at its July 2006 meeting. Appointed to the Committee by President George W. Bush in March 2003, Mr. Omvig serves as a private citizen representing the interests of nonprofit agency employees who are blind. The Committee is an independent Federal agency responsible for administering the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act, a public law that directs the Federal Government to purchase certain products and services furnished by nonprofit agencies employing individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Mr. Omvig is a nationally recognized leader in the field of rehabilitation and lifelong advocate for people who are blind. He began his career as the first blind attorney ever employed by the National Labor Relations Board, and went on to direct the Iowa Commission for the Blind's Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center for nine years. In 1978, he moved to Baltimore to become director of an employment program for people with disabilities at the Social Security Administration for six years. The capstone of Mr. Omvig's career was serving as director of the Alaska Center for Blind and Deaf Adults from 1984-1987.

Mr. Omvig's many professional affiliations include the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, where he is a past president; the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, where he is treasurer; and the National Federation of the Blind. He is an accomplished author of numerous articles, published speeches and books. His most popular book, Freedom for the Blind: The Secret is Empowerment, was republished in 2005 and is a resource for the Department of Education on how best to provide training and rehabilitation services to people who are blind.

"I appreciate President Bush's appointment to this important Federal Committee, and I am pleased to serve as its Vice Chairperson," said Mr. Omvig. "My purpose, which the other Committee members share, is to make sure that people with severe disabilities have the best possible employment opportunities."

As the Committee's Vice Chairperson, Mr. Omvig will continue to play a leadership role in the strategic direction of the JWOD Program, which is the nation's largest employer of people who are blind or severely disabled. In fact, the JWOD Program provides more than 46,000 jobs for this population, including many of the manufacturing jobs at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, headquartered in Baltimore. Other Baltimore-based nonprofit agencies that participate in the JWOD Program include Alliance, Inc., The Chimes and Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake.

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The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled is the independent Federal agency that administers the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program, which generates employment for individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities. National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH (serving people with a range of disabilities) are two central nonprofit organizations that have been designated by the Committee to help Federal agencies and nonprofit organizations that employ persons with severe disabilities participate in the JWOD Program. The JWOD Program's primary means of achieving its employment goal is by facilitating Federal Government purchases of supplies and services from nonprofit agencies employing such individuals.

The Committee's office is located in Arlington, Virginia.